

That's All of Them Uncle George

By Les Goates

Bishop Vaughn J. Featherstone, then of the Presiding Bishopric, related the following account by Brother Les Goates. Brother Goates's father, George, farmed sugar beets west of Lehi, Utah. In 1918, when the events he describes took place, more than 20 million people around the world died in the Spanish influenza epidemic.

"Winter came early that year and froze much of the sugar beet crop in the ground," writes Brother Goates. "My dad and brother Francis were desperately trying to get out of the frosty ground one load of beets each day." One day they received a telephone call that George's nine-year-old grandson Kenneth "had been stricken with the dread 'flu,' and after only a few hours of violent sickness, had died." George was asked to go to Ogden and take the boy to Lehi for burial.

When George arrived at the home he found his son Charles was also sick. Charles asked his father to take the boy and return for him the next day. "Father brought Kenneth home, made a coffin in his carpenter shop, and ... with [my brother] Franz and two kind neighbors [dug] the grave. ...

"The folks had scarcely returned from the cemetery when the telephone rang again." They learned that Charles had died and four of his young children were also sick. Charles's body was sent to Lehi by train, but the next day George had to return to Ogden to get one of the grandchildren, seven-year-old Vesta, who had since died. Before he returned to Lehi with Vesta, a call came again that one of her sick sisters, five-year-old Elaine, had also died. So George made yet "another heartbreaking journey to bring home and lay away a fourth member of his family, all within the week."

The next day George told his son Francis, “‘Well, son, we had better get down to the field and see if we can get another load of beets out of the ground before they get frozen in any tighter.’ ...

“... As they drove along the Saratoga Road, they passed wagon after wagon-load of beets being hauled to the factory and driven by neighborhood farmers. ...

“On the last wagon was ... Jasper Rolfe. He waved a cheery greeting and called out: ‘That’s all of ’em, Uncle George.’“My dad turned to Francis and said: ‘I wish it was all of ours.’“When they arrived at the farm gate ... there wasn’t a sugar beet on the whole field. Then it dawned upon him what Jasper Rolfe meant when he called out: ‘That’s all of ’em, Uncle George!’ ...

“Then father sat down on a pile of beet tops-this man who brought four of his loved ones home for burial in the course of only six days; made caskets, dug graves, and even helped with the burial clothing— ... and sobbed like a little child.

“Then he arose, wiped his eyes with his big, red bandanna handkerchief, looked up at the sky, and said: ‘Thanks, Father, for the elders of our ward.’” (in Conference Report, Apr. 1973, 46–48; or *Ensign*, July 1973, 36–37).

Russell Felt’s Thoughts on this Story

Yes, I know this story. There is one little tidbit to add. Jasper Rolfe was know as a jokester and a character and his response as the Goates past him was probably taken as just that, a joke. Also, I suspect that incident happened along 7th South below us and to the east of us. Thanks, I must look up to see how close George Goates is to Aunt Reva Goates Fox (Uncle Rulon’s wife) and who lived in Unc’s home that we have. There were, it is told, 13 Goates living in that little two bedroom home.

I should add that during that awful time, mother and other girls stayed at the cemetery sometimes all day singing at one graveside after another. Her grandmother died of the flu and her mother thought she saw her mother move in the casket and feared she had been buried alive. That was possible since they didn't embalm etc. Many years later Grandmother Fox was sitting in the Salt Lake Temple. There was a large enough company that she was sitting on a chair in the doorway that led up the stairs to the Telestial Room. Her mother came down the stairs and said, 'Lu' I can't stop to talk, I am very busy, and everything is alright. Grandmother knew everything was alright from then on. Grandmother was Lucy Hartley Fox, third wife of Isaac Fox. The first two wives died in childbirth, one after the other. They had not engaged in polygamy